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A TWO STOP JOURNEY TO HELL

By Sven Sonnenberg

A TWO STEP

JOURNEY

TO

HELL

I was born Sven Sonnenberg in 1931 in Grudziadz, Poland.

My family home and business were located in Jablonowo, about 25 kilometers east of Grudziadz. This was less than twenty kilometers from the border of East Prussia from where the Germans mounted their invasion on that part of Poland in September 1939.

In 1939 my family consisted of my father Martin, my mother, Louise my sister Sylvia and myself, age 7 at that time, the narrator of this account. On the same premises lived my grandmother, Laura, and three uncles, Alfred, Magnus and Ari.

My parents shortly after their wedding

The family owned and operated a wholesale warehouse situated in the center of Jablonowo. The property consisted of two multistory houses, and several utility buildings, all situated on a large piece of land. This warehouse was a distribution center for the vicinity, and prospered. Expansion was contemplated before the war's outbreak. My family was a close–knit unit all working in the business at their assigned duties. My father was the accountant and salesman. My parents were very dedicated to each other, the feeling of mutual love between them permeated every single day as far back as I can remember. They never argued. This feeling of being blessed, of having each other made any issue that could have come between them small and insignificant. Although my mother was a strict disciplinarian her love and care for us children was obvious and ever present. Her devotion to us made any punishment that she meted out for my misbehavior bearable and of lasting educational value. This is how I remember them. Unfortunately only very few photographs survived the holocaust years.

Our family with a friend, he sits to the right, father is standing. I am seven years old holding Sylvia, three years old.

A Two Stop Journey To Hell

Prelude

My first year in school ended badly. I went into the recess of summer 1939 with turmoil in my seven-year-old head. Right from the start the beautifully embroidered Tyrolese shorts my mother so insistently outfitted me with was trouble. The whole first grade and beyond had a field day. My first love, Sophie, a little playful blond, sneered at me mercilessly, but the end of my first – grade year was more serious and ominous. One day the teacher asked the children:

"Now, each of you, tell me what do you have on the wall over your bed?"

The variety of things was not great, mostly crucifixes and the Virgin Mary.

"Sven, what do you have?"

I had the framed portrait of Marshal Smigly – Rydz (the supreme commander of the Polish Forces).

" Look children, a little Jew, and what a patriot!"

That has stayed with me to this day, and will forever. I understood right there that I was different and no matter what merit I might show I was basically flawed and there is no escape from that. From that point on I tried to excel in whatever I was doing to diminish

that flaw in the eyes of whoever I was with. Until one day I did not give a damn any more and I experienced a reversal. I saw the entire gentile world with a healthy dose of skepticism and no longer did things because I was viewed as a Jew.

In August the school recess began and exciting things were happening. The Polish army conducted maneuvers and mock battles in the surrounding countryside. A contingent of soldiers camped in our yard, which was large, and slept in our utility buildings. To the utter dismay of my mother I became uncontrollable. I would not eat her spinach, because I ate with the soldiers from their tins while sitting with them in a circle. The dark coarsely ground bread was such a delight after the white fluffy rolls. The soldiers let me do little chores around their equipment. Great times!

At home the conversation was more and more about a possible war. My mother implored my Father to leave Poland, to go to Switzerland, or anywhere out of the line of a possible German advance. Switzerland was most often discussed, because I think, they had some ties there. I knew they had business associates and friends. I myself was not too concerned; the mighty Polish army would protect us. Certainly the parades through Main Street were impressive. The radio and the speeches were also very reassuring. "We will not let them have one button" (from their uniforms, apparently). "If they attack us we will be in Berlin in two weeks." And so, a busy summer passed, the soldiers were leaving and I was sad again.

I remember vividly the early morning of September 1, 1939. We children had just

crawled into our parent's bed, which was allowed on that day, and the weather was shaping up – it would be bright. That was clearly visible through the window opposite the parental bed. Suddenly we heard rumblings as if a thunderstorm was approaching. My Father said not to worry I was with them. I always was terrified by thunder and lightning. The rumbling got louder and suddenly a big explosion could be heard in our yard and two fair – size holes appeared in the window. A shrapnel fragment embedded itself in a piece of furniture. That is how W.W.II began for us.

My parents grabbed us and we ran into the basement. The basement was somewhat prepared, with sandbags in its windows, water containers and some towels to put over our mouths as a protection against a possible gas attack. Looking back now, it was all naive to the point of stupidity. I think it matched Poland's preparedness for war. Once the shelling stopped our family decided to pack a few things, on our horse – drawn freight wagons and run deeper into Poland. We were living about 20 kilometers from Germany's East Prussia. So we ran, for three days. The smell of fresh hay in the barns where we slept in the countryside comes back now every time I mow the grass.

After we had meandered around for three days, we realized that the Germans were everywhere. The only logical thing to do was to head back home.

At home the new instant owners of what for generations had been ours met us. These were the business tenants who rented store space in one of our houses. They declared themselves to be of German ancestry and became what was called Volksdeutche, which

means ethnic Germans. Not Reichsdeutche – that was a better German. Still, a Volksdeutche was vastly superior to anyone other than a Reichsdeutche. These "ethnics" wore distinguishing armbands and were holier than thou. We were "put up" in one room in what was once our house. All our belongings and business assets were under the control of this ethnic family until further disposition by the new German military administration. In two weeks we learned that the territory would be made "Juden Frei" – free of Jews and we were packed into a special train with one suitcase per person on our journey to: nobody knew.

The journey

This was an ordinary train ride, you might say. The compartments were full since all the Jewish families were crammed into a special car attached to a normally scheduled train. This car was shunted around a lot at several junction stations to be attached to other trains heading toward a destination only the Germans knew. I think there was only one car initially because there were only a few Jewish families in Jablonowo, judging from the attendance at the synagogue where Father took me on Saturdays. We finally arrived at a station named Dzialdowo. To say that we stepped out would not be correct. When the train stopped we saw soldiers alongside it holding sticks and waiting for the train to make a full stop. They then opened the doors and shouted " Raus, schnell, raus, raus Judishe schweine!" (Out, Jewish pigs). They handled their sticks so as to hit selected people and made everybody hurry to form what turned out to be a long column, four in a row. When that column was ready the march began. Apparently many rail cars like ours were assembled into a purely Jewish train. We marched through what appeared to be a small

dingy town and arrived at what looked like military barracks. The column stopped at an entrance, which turned into a fairly broad alley with a tall chain – link fence on both sides. Alongside each fence there were soldiers stationed every few yards, each with a horsewhip in his hand. Then their fun began. The commanding officer shouted:

"Run to the barracks, on the double!"

We started running, my parents on each side trying to shield my sister and me from the whip blows, which fell on us as frequently as the soldiers managed to bring their whips around. The commotion was huge. The sound of whips, the screams of people and the shouting of the Germans:

"Schneller, schneller!" (Faster, Faster)

At first, I was so terrified that I could not think of anything – the fear drowned every emotion. The alley was between fifty and a hundred yards long. No lashes reached me as we proceeded because my father on my right side blocked them, I started to be concerned about Grandma who was one row behind us, and she was 80 years old then. I turned to see that my uncles were half carrying her, dragging her feet on the ground, terror on her face, but again the lashes fell on my three uncles, who managed to shield her perfectly. Finally we reached a building and ran in. It was getting dark; we could barely make out the interior. It was a large interior, certainly not a barracks, rather as if it had been a huge storehouse or maybe an empty stable for horses. On both sides along the walls were areas

with a layer of straw on the ground framed by planks so as to form passageways in the middle along the vast interior. The space was filling up rapidly, families were grouping on the straw areas lying down, making the best arrangement with those of their meager belongings not lost during the running of the gauntlet.

I can't remember how long we were kept there, camping on the straw the whole time. This is where family clusters "organized " their everyday lives, including all functions except going to the open latrine behind the building. Only two vivid memories remain from this long, terrifying sequence of events. The next day a small group of Germans (at that time I was unable to distinguish uniforms or services, they all were military of some sort) came in, with one of them obviously being the boss, for what looked like an inspection. He stopped at a place where he could be heard by most and loudly announced:

> "These quarters were carefully prepared for your comfort. I want them kept clean. The passageways must be swept and free of even one stalk of straw. I do not want my soldiers to stumble and get hurt. Therefore severe punishment will follow any noncompliance."

We saw the punishment the next day. One bastard, having found a straw, selected a young man from the group near where he found it and whipped him unconscious.

Close to our family group camped another large family. There was a baby who started

crying at some point, and would not stop; we could not sleep because of that. The baby carried on most of the next day. Towards evening the mother spoke out loudly,

> "My baby is sick, something is wrong, please pass this down the line, is there a doctor somewhere. The baby has not peed for two days."

Sure enough there was a doctor; I was very curious and tried not to miss any detail. The doctor said that the little guy needed an operation on his penis because of a blockage. The doctor obviously did not have what was necessary for that, but he performed the operation anyway with a pocketknife and improvised with whatever the neighboring clusters of people were able to find for him. The little guy peed very soon and we could sleep again. Happiness reigned among our neighbors.

Somehow my parents protected me from all the nasty goings on until our departure which was, again, terrifying. I remember getting on the train under the blows of sticks wielded by the Germans. They obviously enjoyed herding of us from place to place. From the safety of the compartment I saw a scene to be repeated many times in the future: The train platform from where people were driven into the wagons, German soldiers milling around, some closing the doors, and everywhere debris left on the ground, some purses, hats, pieces of garments and a body here or there. And so we set out to a destination unknown.

They unloaded us in Plock, a historic Polish city. The Ghetto was installed in its midtown

area along the Wide Avenue (Ulica Szeroka) ringed by monuments of this city's splendid past. Cathedrals and churches and other places of historical significance sat all along the high banks of the Vistula river. With the onset of the extremely cold winter of 1940, life became harsh right away. The biggest problem was hunger. My father went out day after day trying to find some food for us. He sold little by little the few jewelry pieces my parents still had. Amazingly there were buyers. The problem was, where to get food for the money. The ghetto was a holding area for thousands of people without any normal economical activity. There were no jobs, no flow of supplies, and no stores. This semblance of an isolated mini – society was in a state of suspension and lingered from day to day, waiting for various ominous developments. The only civic organization existing and allowed to function was the "Gmina Zydowska" – the Jewish Council that passed German orders to the populace and attempted to distribute what meager supplies reached the ghetto from outside. It also organized the work contingents requested by the Germans and tried to implement all kinds of foul ordinances.

One day, in utter exasperation, my parents asked me to go outside the ghetto and buy some food. They agonized about it because it was very dangerous. Eventually they decided that I did not look all that Jewish and had a chance to pass as a Polish boy, any Jew, if caught outside the ghetto with or without the Star of David armband could be shot. So, I went out of the ghetto. The store was only a block away, and I got into the line and soon arrived at the counter.

" Two loaves of bread please and a quarter kilo of butter."

"Sure, but are you not a little Jew, by any chance?"

"No,"

" Well then, cross yourself."

To do that meant to take two fingers of the right hand and touch the forehead, left and right shoulders and belly in the right sequence. I did not know how to do that! This was a moment of terror I have never forgotten. I did not know what to do. Run? – Not possible. The store was too crowded. So, I stood there befuddled for a while.

" What is the hold up?" – shouts from behind.

" I think a little Jew has wiggled his way into the line here."

"Somebody get a policeman, I will hold him."

I was numb with terror. Suddenly an older woman pushed her way from behind until she was close to the counter and me. She spoke to the clerk.

"What is going on here? What do you want from this little boy? Don't you see that he has been scared stiff by you and the crowd here?"

" What do you need, boy?"

"I....I wanted bread and a piece of butter."

" To me he speaks perfect Polish. Give him the bread and don't waste our time. I don't want to have to complain to my son about the inefficiency in this store."

" Yes, Ma'am..."

I would never know who that lady was. With my "purchase", I tried not to run home, but to walk casually on my shaky legs, my face paper white from the slowly subsiding numbing terror.

The pervasive every day hunger – that is what I remember most from the Plock ghetto. My Father coming home in the evening with everything he had managed to get that day. He would set it out on the table and wait hunched over with sunken eyes, wait for Mother to figure out what to do with it. That usually was our only meal for the day. We would go to bed with the pangs of hunger only slightly dulled. There was another worry my parents had that seems silly in retrospect. It was my education. They found a teacher, to prevent me from losing time. I wonder now if this was denial on their part or did they genuinely not comprehend of what was happening?

I received one lasting lesson and that was not from my teacher. One day late in the afternoon there was a commotion in our enclosed little yard, a yard surrounded by high walls on all sides with one entrance from the street. I was playing with some kids when the gate opened and a young man of about 18 was thrown face down on the cobblestones. In the door were two German soldiers.

"Find yourself a place here, Jew"

" I am not a Jew, I was born a German, I am from Hanover. My name is Adler, please, I do not belong with these stinking Jews."

"You stink enough, and don't make more trouble, settle in."

Adler got up and tried to move towards the gate. When he did so, one of the soldiers took the rifle slung over his shoulders and struck him in the stomach with the butt. He doubled over. The gate slammed shut and we got a new inhabitant in our little world. From that moment on I saw Adler coming and going, always with his head high and contempt on his face for whoever was around. Only once did I hear him speak. Passing through the yard someone shouted to him.

" Hello man, where are you from?"

" You will address me Mister Adler and I have nothing to say to you, except that I

am from Hanover and I do not belong here. I was born a German and I will die as a German."

People gossiped a little, but not much. It was said that he was from a mixed marriage. The Germans had strict rules of heritage by which they determined if one was Jewish or not. That incident taught me a lesson never ever to forget. Never try to claim that you are anything but a Jew. I would learn this later to an even greater degree when I found myself among the Poles. They were usually such pure Poles! Although born in Poland I was very impure. I have gotten a hint of that already in my first school year before the war.

Mister Adler had barely settled in when the Plock ghetto ended. One day there was an announcement by a German soldier with a loudspeaker from the middle of the yard.

" All Jews must pack and be ready for tomorrow's assembly in the street at daybreak. Only hand – carried luggage is allowed."

That message was repeated three or four times as the soldier turned to face all four sides of the yard. After the soldier left we had all afternoon and night to "pack". The streets were suddenly alive with people rushing in all directions in bewilderment, trying to find more information or trying to place some prized possession with someone with a lesser burden. One woman, an always elegantly dressed neighbor on our floor, brought over a pair of beautiful cherry colored leather boots. The only trouble was, they were ladies boots on medium heels and not fitting my Mother. She said to my Mother: "Let your son

put these on and you pack his small shoes. If we get separated and I can not retrieve them, they are yours. I can't bring myself to leave them behind. They are brand-new and a present. Out of terrifying hours of that time I still remember the lady's face and my distress at being forced to put on those boots.

In the morning we were ready with our hand luggage and dressed in multiple layers of clothing. Everything we could possibly manage to, we put on. My parents were sitting on their beds, my Mother holding my sister in her lap. I was sitting by the side of my Father, all of us in total silence, our anxiety mounting by the minute. Finally we heard the troops entering the yard. The noise was unmistakable. We jumped ready for whatever might be coming.

" Raus, schnell, raus!"

(Out, quickly, out)

As we entered the yard I saw Mister Adler fly out the opposite stairway entrance, shouting. " I am a German, I am a German." One of the soldiers dispatching people at the door reached over and gave him a good whack over his shoulders. Then he was swept away by the stream of people and I never saw him again.

We assembled on the street in rows by families so that the whole long street (it was called the Wide Avenue and had a median of grass and two cobblestone lanes on each side) was

filled with people as far as one could see, everyone with a heap of clothes on and small suitcases in their hands. On the side lanes, German soldiers of all kinds of service units were busying themselves with maintaining order in the column. We were standing there waiting for who knows what. Towards the late afternoon older people and the sick started fainting here and there. We heard calls for water, but no water or food was delivered. The soldiers, oblivious to the cries, kept patrolling alongside the column. Later the word was passed that the Germans will forgo the transfer of the ghetto to a new location for a price. People should give up their valuables, and if they did the whole thing would be called off. The representatives of the ghetto Council went along the column to collect whatever the people threw into their baskets. When this was finished, I saw a group of soldiers appear from a side street. They all carried sticks. On command they fell upon the column, hitting left and right, and shouted.

" Nach hause, nach hause!"

(Go home, go home)

Evidently there were a number of groups of Germans whose job this was, to run people off the street fast. In panic, our family ran to the nearest door. We went into a building, and from the safety of a room that appeared to be an empty one – time store, I looked out onto the street, and saw the by now all too familiar landscape. The area was strewn with all kinds of possessions, garments in pieces, packages and here and there a body lying motionless. Two or three silhouettes sitting up and rocking slowly back and forth under the darkening sky, the Germans walking over the area, casually poking with their sticks at

this or that item on the ground.

The next day was quiet. Nothing happened, and we camped in that storeroom as best as we could. The next day, at dawn, the whole assembly in the street was repeated. No one was surprised at the ruse the Germans had played on us with the valuables' collection. In mid- morning trucks came, stopping at intervals along one side of the column. The Germans then separated out sections of the column and directed that section towards a truck. Usually a chair or stool was placed at the back of the truck so that people had to climb up that unstable support. Leading to each truck was the familiar deployment of two rows of German soldiers with sticks. Then, there was more "fun". In front of us was a family with an obese man who could not get onto the truck. We waited as he kept falling off that chair under the blows of sticks. Finally the Germans ordered him to stop trying and step aside. The two rows of soldiers closed around the fat man, and the beating really began. The heavy man fell to the ground and tried to protect his face and head with his arms. The Germans kept hitting him as if competing to see who could deliver more blows. After a short while they stepped away to resume the driving of people onto the truck. On the ground, I saw what looked like a big bundle of rags, motionless, a big balding head stuck to it with a bloody, messed-up face turned towards me as we ran to that chair behind the truck that now frightening piece of furniture. My Father shielded me from the blows of the sticks.

After the truck was packed tight it moved out. I do not remember a guard in the back with us. During this drive of a few hours while underway we passed small villages where

people had lined up at the roadside and threw food into the truck. Apparently these were ghettos which were still in existence along our route. Eventually we ended up in Konskie, a dingy little place. From our stopping point we marched through the middle of town and there was total indifference on the faces of the Polish townspeople, as if our march was the commonest everyday occurrence. We passed through town uneventfully and settled into the march to our destination about twelve miles away. That is how we arrived in Drzewica, the last ghetto before the Jews were taken to the extermination camps, one of which was Treblinka.

Drzewica was the place we stayed for a while. My Father cared for his own family, whereas my three uncles and Grandma formed the other part of the family. We got a single room, my uncles a corner of a now empty synagogue. About two thousand people were crammed into a small area in this tiny village with no fences or guards. The perimeter of the ghetto was not even marked except later when typhoid fever kept breaking out. At the first Jewish house on each street a poster would be placed:

"DANGER TYPHOID FEVER BEYOND THIS POINT."

The ghetto formed a mini society, with " rich" people, "middle – class" people and the destitute. The rich were somehow trading their possessions for food, and that trade moved across the magic invisible ghetto boundary line. The middle class people – artisans and service people – were somehow surviving. The poor and most newcomers to the place like us were starving. This group grew larger by the day. Soon, there was a

routine horse-drawn wagon full of the bodies of those who had died from starvation departing every day from the village to the cemetery on the outskirts.

A distinct group was the Chassids. They ran a cheder (a religious school) and prayed incessantly. They tried to maintain a corner of the synagogue and constantly moved books in brown leather covers from one place to another they thought more secure. Their behavior antagonized the rest of the community, and we became especially angry with them during the outbreak of typhoid fever. They would not let a doctor near them, and most dangerously, would not follow the basic rules of hygiene and quarantine.

" If God wants me to die, I will, no matter what is done."

They opposed any action directed to contain the disease. They were also magnets for the German raiders, who came to town periodically. They would seek out a few Chassids and line them up and amuse themselves by testing the sharpness of their bayonets on the beards of those poor devotees of God. When finished, the Germans would argue among themselves whose was the better shave.

The Germans amusing themselves with Hassidim's

Drzewica was slowly starving. Amazingly, people were still preoccupied with trifles and holy rituals were adhered to as much as possible. I remember an older man sitting on the stone steps at the adjacent entrance to our house. He was cutting his fingernails and very methodically collected the shavings on a white cloth. Asked why, he said:

> " Don't you know that there is a commandment that requires hair and any other bodily clippings to be properly disposed of?"

After that, I always wondered what I should properly do with my nail clippings.

Apart from the everyday mundane death scenes there were some more dramatic ones.

There was a man who lived in an abandoned railway freight car not far from our one-room dwelling. I saw him going about alone; evidently he had no family. His loneliness and the fact that he had a rail car all to himself piqued my interest. One day I saw him sitting with his feet dangling out having a feast from goodies neatly placed on the floor of the car at the entrance. He ostentatiously drank and ate for everybody to see. Two days later I saw the death wagon come by and men carrying the body of the loner out to dump him on top of the already high heap of bodies. I was told that he had traded everything he had for food, ate it all and hung himself.

I have witnessed the slow starvation of my Grandmother and uncles. Uncle Ari died of typhoid fever and was carried out with the daily death wagon ride. Uncle Alfred and Magnus starved to death and were one day also taken out to the outskirts cemetery. I was seeing them first getting thin, skeleton like, and then they would become bloated and grotesquely swollen. That is the last image of both of them I have retained. I do not know exactly how Grandma died. One day I was told that she is not with us anymore.

The time came when rumors started that something big was going to happen, though nobody knew what. It was said among other things that the entire ghetto is to be sent somewhere. My life in the ghetto up to this point had been a strange mixture of feeling secure in the family and jolts of terror from the entire goings-on around me. Whenever there was something terrible happening in the streets I always was able to run to the relative safety of my family. Mom and Dad so far had managed to keep the most horrible things that were happening to others away from me. I felt somewhat alienated from other

children because of my mixed parentage – my mother was German. No strong rejection, but the kids would call me a "JEKE". Since they saw me sometimes sitting on the steps in front of the house and sipping a cup of fake coffee, it became JEKE MIT A TOP KAVE. So, I was a jeke and that also stuck with me ever after. It reminds me of the famous orphan character from Sholem Aleichem.

"Ich'bin a jusem, mir is git." (I am an orphan, I have it good)

I can say, "Ich bin a jeke, mir is git."

I do not belong anywhere. Drifting alone through space, a stranger in any groups of people no matter what its make up. The feeling of not belonging anywhere deepened after my Mother died a few years later.

Moritz of Opoczno

Opoczno was a drab little town in the middle of rural Poland twenty kilometers from Drzewica. In 1942 it was the seat of a German garrison for the district, with a few buildings fit for the occupying military and civilian organizations. The surrounding little towns and villages had no German forces stationed there and were controlled from Opoczno by frequent forays. In between, the Germans entrusted the administration to the black-clad police recruited from Polish collaborators. Drzewica, as mentioned before had no Germans stationed there, even during the existence of a Jewish ghetto in the years 1940 to 1942. There was no barbed wire outlining this ghetto's boundaries. It was known

which was the last Jewish house on the central and side streets, and a Jew was not supposed to cross that unmarked line. If he did the consequences were dire. Inside the ghetto starvation was the order of the day, with no goods or human traffic crossing the "magic line."

I once witnessed the following scene: My family's dwelling in the ghetto was the last one on the "main" street before the line, and looking out the window I saw a girl about 15 coming from the "Aryan side" towards the Ghetto line. She had a large bowl in front of her, which she held with both arms outstretched since it was large like one used for kneading bread dough. She hurried to get across the line, and almost made it. A group of four young Polish men caught up with her, grabbed the bowl and overturned it. Out came a heap of potato peels. One of the men grabbed the girl by her long hair, and kneeing her in the back, pushed her over the line. The others laughed and made rude remarks, shouting: "That should teach you not to leave your Jewish place again!" Undoubtedly there were Poles who had given the girl the potato peels (cooked, they were a delicacy in those days). However, there were always those who willingly and voluntarily maintained a watch over the Jews to keep them where the Germans intended. Those locals who smuggled food into the ghetto ran the risk of denunciation by their own, and death. Many took that risk, and some, only some, are memorialized at Yad Vashem in the Avenue of the Righteous. By and large the ghetto was isolated with about 2000 sick and starving inhabitants crammed into a small area. Sporadic outbreaks of typhoid fever added to the terrible toll from starvation, and the isolation was made even more complete by the German scare propaganda.

The head of the commando unit stationed in Opoczno was named Moritz. He raided the district villages with German precision and regularity. Often, because of that German predictability our ghetto was forewarned of his arrival. To know often made a life or death difference, since there was a nasty ordinance in place that the streets should be clear when he arrived. One day, a sunny summer day, he came unexpectedly. His three military vehicles, each holding a few of his cohort, stopped in the middle of the town square. I was looking out the window and saw the people running to get off the street into the nearest buildings and away from town center, where the Germans were jumping out of their cars. The Germans hurried, with their guns leveled at whoever was still not out of their line of vision. The shooting that began immediately left a few bodies on the ground. I was mesmerized by one man who ran towards a fence in a zigzag pattern, one German shooting at him, loading his gun repeatedly, missing every time. Then, when the man got to the top of the fence and balanced there for a moment, the German aimed carefully. I did not hear the shot I expected. The man got over the fence while the German swore loudly, and started to pull at his gun breach. Unable to open it, he took his bayonet and with its handle tried to knock the gun open. He held the gun upright against the ground with his left hand, bent over, and swung at the breach with the bayonet, swearing all the time "Donnervetter, eine ferfluchte scheise." Before long all the shooting stopped, and from a corner of the half open window I saw what must have been Moritz standing in the middle of the circle of his helmeted troops. He was slender, not tall but carrying himself very upright. He did not have a rifle or machine gun but a pistol holster and brown gloves. He swung energetically around as if surveying the scene and then barked some

order that I did not hear. The helmets started moving out in a widening circle.

At that point fear started seeping into me, I slid to the floor corner of the room so as to be totally out of sight. I did not know what to do next, so I sat there motionless. My Mother after going to the door and locking it took my baby sister and sat down under the window in the opposite corner with her in her lap. She signaled for silence with a finger at her lips. Soon we heard a commotion in the adjacent room. There was a locked door opposite the entrance of our single room which led to another dwelling that we knew was some kind of an administrative office with a telephone. I heard voices; among them was the loud commanding bark of what had to be Moritz.

Then there was silence. Shortly after, another set of noises became apparent under the window, sounds of footsteps as if a number of people had gathered. Then the wailing and crying started. This was interrupted by a loud guttural shout "Ruhe"(Silence). After a moment a male voice: "Herr, bitte, the ropes are so tight, it hurts terribly ". I heard crunching footsteps of a soldier's nailed boots. "Na, ja, das ist doch zu stramm." (Right, it is too tight). Some muffled sounds and after that, the man's voice: "Danke herr, danke."(Thank you, sir, thank you).

The wailing started again, but very subdued. I could not make out the words mixed with the faint moaning. Shortly after that there was the clatter typical of soldiers when they assemble. All the equipment they carry makes a distinct noise of canteens dangling, boots grinding against the ground, et cetera. The sound of guns being loaded was unmistakable.

The wailing became louder. Then, we heard "Feuer" and shots rang out. After a short while the commotion in the adjacent room started again. Moritz was at the telephone calling Opoczno, and his voice this time was sweet and gentle. He gave an account of the day's work.

"Liebling es war doch ein richtiges vergnugen." (Darling, it was really great fun).

After this he must have started eating his lunch, because whenever he spoke it was as if with a full mouth.

We did not dare move until we heard the departing German cars. I stood up and looked out the window, trembling. Horse drawn carts came close to the wall and assembled in a line. Men carried the bodies and piled them up in the wagons. After this was done and the carts departed, two men with rakes came and raked dirt beside the wall below the window. Only when everybody had left did I venture out to look. The soil under the window was freshly raked, but I could clearly see darker spots and here and there was what looked like a shiny ligament or a piece of flesh torn away by a bullet. That sight has never left me and is as fresh in my vision as if it had happened yesterday.

As mentioned before the ghetto was unguarded. One autumn day we woke to noises in the street, a big commotion and an announcement that we all were being sent to a larger ghetto. Consolidation. This time the ghetto was surrounded by a motley group of Germans and black-uniformed police with some other troops said to be Ukrainians. We

were trapped. We were told to pack, one suitcase per person, and be ready for transport in the morning. This time, in the evening, my parents held a soul-searching and dramatic meeting to decide whether to go along. It had finally dawned on them that something was very fishy and they should not. I remember some of the conversation.

Mother: "If we must die, I want us to be together."

Father: " You cannot make such a decision for the children. We must save them. I will come out and join you when I can. We could raise suspicion now, if I disappear too. They might start looking for all of us. We cannot risk that."

They decided that my Mother with both of us children would sneak out and Father would join us the following night, since he had learned of two groups being formed for transport. For this to succeed he had to find a "black" policemen and bribe him to let us trough. So, in the morning before dawn we sneaked past an "unseeing " black-uniformed policeman, and then hid in the forest for two or three days. Finally we ventured out of the forest. With my mother holding us both by our hands, we walked towards the village. There came a peasant with his horse and carriage. "What are you doing here, Jews? All the rest have gone to the gas. You can dig yourself a grave here. Do you want a shovel"? He drove off laughing. As we got closer to the village we saw a cloud of feathers. That was the result of looting by the hordes of locals – ripping the feather bedding is a necessary step in the search for valuables. We waited outside for one night, and the next

day we entered the desolate area that had been the ghetto. Devastation was everywhere – a hurricane would create a scene like this. Belongings and broken furniture lay in the streets, and many windows were smashed. My mother selected a half-caved in house – hopefully no one would claim this one for a while. We went in to hide there, from the elements, since the autumn weather was worsening. It was now November 1942.

Drzewica

Until the fall of 1942 we had been confined to the smaller of the two squares in the village of Drzewica. The larger square was adjacent beyond a row of houses. These houses divided Drzewica and made a barrier through the middle of the village. Opposite those houses there was a large church complex. The ghetto territory was enclosed around the smaller square. To one side right by the dividing row of houses that allowed a narrow passage between the two squares was the synagogue. Drzewica served as center for the surrounding countryside. The "Odpusty" (church fairs) were held on the church grounds and I would guess that the synagogue also served the needs of some nearby Jewish families from the smaller settlements before the war.

The house that Mother selected for our dwelling was tucked in the corner of the square with its back to the larger square and facing the synagogue. This house partially caved in looked like a heap of rubble from the outside. Beyond the debris inside we found a room intact with a window looking out towards the now empty and looted synagogue. The view was partially obstructed by beams and other parts of the house. It looked as if one

corner had collapsed and wrapped itself around the front of what remained standing.

We settled into this room. From the possessions strewn around the ruins we were able to arrange relatively comfortable living quarters. For a stranger looking at the heap of rubble with the small portion still standing but partially obstructed by debris it would seem improbable that someone could live there. Of course, our settling there was largely by chance, but once there we felt that its appearance was perhaps what was needed for a reasonable "hiding" place. The problem now was how to sustain ourselves. The greatest danger came from the locals. Would they leave us alone or would they denounce us to the Germans and especially to the gendarmes or the SS outfits that passed sporadically through the village to make forays into suspected partisan strongholds? Drzewica now, as before the liquidation of the ghetto, was free of any German military presence. The Nowe Miasto gandarmerie outpost was twenty kilometers away, and Moritz with his outfit was in Opoczno, about fifteen kilometers away. Drzewica was free of Germans except for "actions" that were carried out after being precipitated by a variety of factors.

These actions or forays struck terror in us. Most of the time we had some warning because the Germans came in by two access roads to the village. Both led into the big square. There the Germans would make their base and the commotion of this gave us time to hurry into the adjacent woods before they fanned out into the village. We would spend the day or whatever time was necessary waiting until they left. We could tell by approaching the edge of woods close to the village. The actions mounted by the Germans usually lasted a few hours until their goals had been achieved, whatever they were. The

danger to us was that some of the locals might point our ruin out and that would doom us.

The next worry was food. Hunger was our ever-present torture. I went out to forage into the fields for leftovers from the harvest. I dug out and collected everything that I could find, frozen or not. Carrots and potatoes were sometimes buried deep enough to be edible. One day I hit a bonanza. I found an abandoned flourmill, and the flour and grain I collected from crevices sustained us for a short while. Times became better when the crops began to ripen. I went out and collected (stole) much of what was needed to keep us from outright starvation.

What saved us was an event that occurred some time after the ghetto liquidation. On the other side of the river a huge commotion started one day. Construction equipment arrived, and a lot of black uniformed Todd organization units. This organization named after General Todd had the mission of supporting troops by constructing roads, fortifications and whatever was necessary. This was their mission and concern, not chasing Jews or any other military/political pursuit. With typical German single-minded dedication to their narrow mission they went about their task, to build barracks for young Polish conscripts in a work organization called "Junaki" – Young Men's Labor Brigade. These young Polish men did all kinds of auxiliary work for the German war machine. They were rounded up in actions called " lapanka" (catching) and given a choice, to be sent to Germany for slave labor or to "volunteer" for the Junaki organization and stay closer to home, doing work for the Germans out of their "free will." I think the Germans considered that arrangement more efficient.

When that camp started functioning and we continued to be pressed for food (my digger-gatherer activity barely allowed us to stay ahead of starvation), my Mother said one day,

> "Children, I have to go there and see if I can get some work. Maybe they need some kitchen help."
>
> " But Mother…"
>
> "Sven, I have no choice, we will starve otherwise. These are Todd people maybe I will find some human soul there. I will tell them some story about how we are temporarily here waiting for our paperwork that is being processed to restore my rights as a pure German (a Reichsdeutche)."

So, my Mother got a job as kitchen help in the Junaki work camp.

This had an immediate and huge benefit; it gave us food and it also confused the locals utterly as to our status. Now they saw my Mother go to work every day in the German compound. I was a little bit more relaxed and did not scurry around like a hunted animal anymore. I ventured to go and watch the kids play a game called "palant"- something akin to baseball. I stood there on the side, a picture of shyness and poised to run at any signs of hostility. One boy much older than me, a lot of them were sixteen or older, moved in my direction and said,

"Hey, little Jew, catch that ball."

He threw the makeshift baseball in my direction, and I caught it nonchalantly with my left hand. His face went from a derisive smile to very serious.

"Do you want to try a game with us? I will put you on my team."

No doubt that I would try a game! I became a prized player. The team captains would draw lots to decide which team I would be on. I was proficient catching with my left-hand and that was a premium. I gained confidence and felt safe as long as I was in the company of these familiar boys. Being now more open on the "Aryan" side I had a chance for a bit of insight into the life of Polish society during the years of the German occupation. The days now passed in an effort to avoid dangerous situations and most importantly dangerous people.

The village and the surrounding countryside were teeming with partisan activity. There were many factions constantly feuding with each other. On the average there were two funerals a day in Drzewica as a result of assassinations carried out by rival units against each other. All I knew was to keep from crossing the path of any of those units. I was unable to distinguish between the Communists (AL), the Home army (AK) and the Nationalists (NSZ). At times some of them would behave so brazenly as to parade in prewar Polish military uniforms through the village. While non-of them ever bothered us

danger nonetheless loomed everywhere.

There was a large farm/estate run for the Germans by Polish tenants. This is where I went when crops were ripening to dig out some new potatoes and look for anything else that was edible. One day a farmer who had no interest in protecting German property (or so it seemed) caught me. His fields were not even adjacent, but here he had caught a Jew obviously stealing German property, and my uncertain status not withstanding, this should do me in. He tied me to his cart with a rope and started dragging me to the nearest German authority. Where would he find one close enough so that I would still be alive after being dragged like this? I did not know. The farmer was driving his horse and I ran behind the cart in terror, stumbling and wiggling trying to free myself. Eventually I was able to scrape the rope against the rough wood of the farm cart and break it. I ran into the nearby bushes and escaped. The bastard gave up looking for me after a while—the head start I had before he could stop the horse and get off the cart made the difference.

There was a brief period of heightened fear, and it was not directly from the Germans; in 1944 the Warsaw uprising took place. We watched the glowing sky over Warsaw in the distance, and after a while refugees from Warsaw started arriving in Drzewica. A number of people escaped the burning capital city that was being systematically dynamited house by house by German troops. People scattered in all directions and a number ended up in Drzewica. Some turned out to be nasty. City slickers—they tried to show of. Inevitably some got interested in my family trying to show how tough one ought to be with Jews. They started harassing me at every turn. What saved us and particularly me from harm

were the tough local farm boys whose respect I had gained through games. Besides, they had their own animosity towards the so annoyingly arrogant city slickers. The importance of judging people by subtle or not so subtle clues was hammered into me by another memorable incident.

One day I went to meet Mom at the Junaki compound. Usually I waited near the main gate, out of sight though, at an abandoned shack. The windows of the shack were missing, and the part of the wall away from the compound was missing too. I would join Mom when she came out after she finished her shift. On that day I saw a girl about eighteen years old dressed in a lightweight black dress. The dress was short, showing her legs and it was snug around her breast, which being nicely outlined appeared very firm. Her face was handsome, but bore a strange expression of bewilderment and absence of mind. Her movements towards the gate were erratic, as if she was not sure of her purpose. She had a bag slung over her shoulder; the kind beggars sometimes have to hold things. One of the Junaks was standing at the gate, and the girl asked if she could get some leftover food. The man said:

"Wait here, I will check."

He walked back into the compound and I saw him collecting some of the other young men and four Junaks came out of the gate. Seeing this the girl started drifting towards the shack and I was able to pick up the conversation among them. The leader:

" We need a rope or something to tie the dress above her head. One of you go get it."

One of the other men:

" Yeah… I saw her before, I am sure she is a mental, she will not know what happened."

The girl was moving around aimlessly. The men came toward the shack and corralled the girl there. One of the men pulled her dress up over her head; the other quickly tied it up with the rope. They pulled her panties down. The girl was moaning and thrashing around trying to free herself and it was now that for the first time I saw a naked girl. She was beautifully shaped. Her dress pulled up high over her breasts, conical shaped breasts, firm and tipped up. The men forced her down in a corner. At that moment there was a shout from the gate,

"Hey guys what are you doing there outside the compound?"

"Nothing Sarge, just having a smoke."

"Back inside, on the double."

Obviously he could not see the girl inside the shack. The four men moved in a hurry

towards the gate and the sergeant. Shaking, I went over and untied the rope; I saw her face close—it was sheer terror. She was moaning and sobbing softly. I picked up her bag, she slung it over her shoulder and still sobbing she moved away without a word. I sat down with my face covered, devastated. Amongst all the horrors of that war this one episode has etched itself into my memory, so that, whenever I think back to the war that scene floats up every time. I resolved then and there to redouble my caution around humans, be they German or not.

Nonetheless my curiosity about all kinds of trades brought me into contact with a cabinetmaker named Ramus. I would spend a lot of time in his shop helping with whatever he allowed me to do. He also gave us shelter if there was an unexpected raid, especially in winter when it would be difficult to hide in the forest. He did so matter–of–factly with a calm demeanor as if it was the most routine thing. He risked the destruction of his family if not worse by doing this and he knew it.

Soon the Russians were approaching and the situation changed dramatically. We heard the rumble of artillery in the distance. There was anticipation, anxiety about impending events. The German occupation was drawing to an end. In addition there was the assassination attempt on Hitler, which temporarily threw the Germans into some confusion. I remember front line soldiers marching westward through the village, bedraggled, foraging for food and ingratiatingly saying,

"Hitler kaput."

Suddenly the area was flooded with Wermacht troops from all kinds of units preparing to make a stand. We huddled in the deepest crevices of that building we had found, not daring to breathe loudly. One morning we saw two German soldiers searching, and eventually they came upon us. A tall sergeant yanked me out of a corner. "People here tell us that you are Jews. Are you?" Ugh ..... Ehhh .....

"You, boy, come with us to the major."

The major asked a few questions but his main interest was to see if I spoke fluent German, which I did.

"You will be assigned to the sergeant, boy. We will give you some provisions now, and you report tomorrow at dawn to him. We have trenches to dig, and you will translate instructions to the locals who are already organized in work groups."

Some more bastards tried again. One day, while going busily about the trenches I saw a vehicle stop in the distance. Out came four or five black–clad Totenkopf SS (the skull insignia was their mark, placed on their caps). One of the trench diggers stopped and went over to the SS men and I saw him pointing in our direction. I could feel the blood draining out of my face. All one had to do was to point a finger and say "JUDE" to these guys. The sergeant, as if alerted by something, looked at my face.

"What is the matter?"

I barely came out with a whisper,

"SS."

He took one look and barked:

"Get behind me."

We inched toward the nearest structure. "Crawl into a hole and stay there until I come for you." I heard his boots crunching away in the direction of the SS men.

The end of the German presence came swiftly. One day, in the morning, we heard all hell break loose; heavy guns thundering and small arms-fire. We ran into the cellar and stayed there until all was quiet. After we left the cellar I went for exploring with the throng of people that came out of their hiding places also. The first dead German soldier I saw was lying face down in the middle of the street, his boots, belt and coat was gone. We moved beyond the river where the fiercest fighting had taken place. Bodies lay everywhere, on top of the trenches as if killed in the process of trying to get out and run. Most of them stripped naked. The ones still partially in uniform were stripped before my eyes. Looters with armfuls of all kinds of German clothing were running toward home in fear that someone would stop them. I saw an elderly man pick up a handkerchief and put it on the

exposed genitals of a soldier who lay on his back— an exception. Some wounds were terrible. One German had his skull partially blown off; little blood, just the exposed brain.

The throng of people was moving like a swarm of bees from one place of excitement to another. The Russian soldiers moved in-groups, rounding up hiding Germans. I went back to the Town Square and saw a lone German soldier wandering around in a daze. He kept muttering:

"Mein lieber Got, meine Frau, meine kinder" (Dear God, my wife, my children)

He repeated the phrase over and over. One of the Russian commanding officers pointed to a group of other Germans and told him to go there. In a little while two Russian soldiers marched the group towards the other side of the river. The spectators followed. The Germans were lined up at the edge of a trench and the executions started. One of the Germans, apparently only painfully wounded, fell to his knees and made a movement with his right hand as if asking for more shots, to be finished. The Russians turned around and left. The people fell upon the dead to strip them naked. Some were left in their long johns.

Mother decided to wait in Drzewica long enough for Father to return and find us. The next day Russian soldiers came to the ruin where we lived and took me to their officer. My Mother did not speak Polish.

" Who are you people?"

"We are Jews who escaped from the ghetto and have been hiding here in this ruin since then."

"You were pointed out to us by the locals here as having aided the Germans."

" When the Germans came to town we were pointed out to them as fugitive Jews and our hiding place disclosed. The Germans forced me to interpret for them. We were trying to survive."

That was the end of that. I established good relations with some of the Russian soldiers and was around them as much as I could be, fascinated with their equipment.

After the war we waited for my father in that cursed place, Drzewica. Out of 2000 people only 25 showed up to look for their relatives. Many more had taken the initiative to run and hide but like my father they never came back.

Two weeks passed and Father did not show up, so Mother decided to go to Lodz, a bigger city. The Jewish Council placed my sister and me in an orphanage in Helenowek, a suburb of Lodz, and gave Mother a job in the kitchen as a cook. One day we traveled to our home in Jablonowo, where we found both our houses a heap of burned out bricks. All the rest of our business establishment was gone. Not an item from that extensive property

was left, and the value left to us was a few acres of wasteland. The war was over. All that was left of our family was the three of us, Mother, my sister and me, with the shabby rags on our backs our only possessions. Mother kept hoping that Father was alive and would find us. She kept that hope to the end of her life. She died in 1949.

In the orphanage

From here on I embarked on new journey through another bewildering period of the Stalinist regime in Poland. My drifting alone through space continued, a stranger in any groups of people no matter what its make up. The feeling of not belonging anywhere deepened as I moved along the new journey path

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My ghetto experiences come out of the recesses of my memory at the slightest stimulation. Even a seemingly remote association is enough. Reading Bruno Bettelheim's essay "Freedom from Ghetto Thinking" easily brought it out and made me go back in time in an attempt to examine the state of my mind, and that of my parents and fellow ghetto dwellers. The central point of Mr. Bettelheim's thesis is that Jews in the ghettos, by a long tradition maintained in the Diaspora, acquired an attitude of total submission and meekness, making the job of their extermination astonishingly easy for the Germans. What was my state of mind at that time, at age 11? I had no broad historic knowledge of the Nazi movement or its stated goals, of course. Fear, hunger and preoccupation with the day's survival are the only things I remember. Mr. Bettelheim considers it a given that even minimally educated Jews must have known the truth about the Nazis. My parents certainly were very well educated. Had they seriously considered or talked about the ultimate consequences of what the Germans were doing? Not that I remember. There was disbelief about the possibility of mass extermination even when someone hinted at it. "This is the twentieth century, things like this are unthinkable," was the usual consensus. What about events like the one described? These were thought to be the excesses of a few devilish types like Moritz. If only the higher German authorities might learn about it! To add confusion to Mr. Bettelheim's argument that the eastern ghettos were bereft of those who had had the initiative to leave the ghettos for the "past three generations", I must point out; The ghettos established by the Germans collected all those who were outside in the gentile world like my parents. So, there were plenty of bright, modern, educated people in each of the ghettos, people who had freed themselves from the ghetto culture.

What perhaps might be a plausible explanation is that these people hadn't had the time, willingness or opportunity to bond with the "masses", and become their leaders and turn them from "ghetto thinking."

The so-called masses of Jewish shopkeepers, shoe repairmen and tailors had no inkling of the world outside their narrow confines, much less about Hitler's writings and the global political goals of the Germans. The elite was naive, trusting and "innocent." Sometimes people develop an instinct without too much theorizing or verbalizing they "feel" that something is out of kilter, and then act. Even for this to happen there needs to be leadership. Advocates of a certain course of action have to come forward. In Poland the instinct and the leadership were lacking. I grant this to Mr. Bettelheim. Suppose they were present, this instinct and leadership, what then, given the hostile surroundings where even the Poles were murdering each other across the political spectrum without any German encouragement? When I "lived" outside the ghetto later, I saw at least two funerals a day resulting from fights between different Polish partisan factions. Should a Jewish leadership (if there had been one) have attempted to organize armed resistance with that kind of outside conditions plus the aversion of the ghetto Jew to even looking at a gun? Theoretically it was possible. It has happened in a few places— with suicidal results. Should this have been the norm rather than the exception? Yes! I would however refrain from pinning blame on those poor, lost, bewildered, disoriented and leaderless souls who, dazed, went to the slaughter.

The ghetto people felt trapped on all sides. The murderous Germans! The hostility

outside! For many who ventured to leave the ghetto it meant instant death if caught and delivered to the Germans. Mr. Bettelheim cites the fact that once the Jews took up resistance there was help from the outside, like in the Warsaw uprising. That was far from even a hope in Drzewica. So, Mr. Bettelheim, I would not be so ready to attach blame to the poor masses of downtrodden ghetto dwellers. Besides, to organize resistance one needs not only leaders, but also some rudimentary vestiges of the defiant and combative attitudes that were totally lacking in those unhappy souls beaten down for generations. So the notion that something could have been done is purely theoretical and unrealistic given the circumstances of that period. Do I wish we had fought, run, hid, done anything but go on the transports? Definitely! What permeates me is not shame, but regret that we did not fight.

To suggest, as Mr. Bettelheim does, that escape trough the Pripec marches was possible is a sheer fantasy. To ask a shopkeeper with a flock of small kids to pack up his family and head over the marshes into the Soviet Empire is completely unrealistic. Under Stalin the traditional murderous Russian anti–Semitism was simmering and Jewish leadership and culture was being destroyed. That much knowledge seeped through to the ghettos. The people who went to the Soviet Union were mostly communist political activists acutely aware that they would be shot by their competitors, the Nazis, Jew or not. Their Soviet political comrades shot many on arrival anyway.

I accept Mr. Bettelheim's concept of ghetto thinking. For it is within me to a large degree. I have to watch myself and be careful not to fall too easily into that mold, even

now. My first instinct is always appeasement, even if it is obviously of very temporary effect. I act on my second impulse and fight only if I am cornered without an escape route. Not fighting, even in extreme circumstance, was the survival method for the Jews in the Diaspora for ages. This has conditioned them to ghetto thinking. However, the circumstances during W.W.II in the German occupied territories included the additional element of total entrapment and would have been difficult for any national group even with the best attributes of resistance and fighting. So, let's leave the total undiminished blame on the murderous Germans and the schmaltzowniks (those Poles who hunted down Jews for profit)! It is also difficult to accept Mr. Bettelheim's assertion that:

> "German Jews (and those of Poland, too) permitted themselves to remain innocent, avoided eating from the tree of knowledge and remained ignorant of the nature of the enemy."

To lump the Jewish communities with those of Germany is not right. The Jews of other European countries had a right to expect protection, as had their gentile population. I clearly remember the Polish propaganda slogan just before the war's outbreak. " We will not let them have one button" (from their uniforms, apparently). Poland was smashed in 6 weeks, hardly much longer than the Warsaw Ghetto uprising lasted. When almost every neighbor of Germany crumbled in short order there was shock and disbelief. How about those governments and elites, including the Polish, were they stupid and incompetent? Were they "innocent"; if not, what were they? To expect from the Jews a superior foresight as to the outcome of the German onslaught is a bit much. I think one cannot

escape the thought that things were much more complex than just the psychological make up of the ghetto Jew.

So, we survived. I have to give this to Mr. Bettelheim, passivity was a sure death sentence. Many also perished by being betrayed, as I was, outside the ghetto. After the war we waited for my father in that cursed place, Drzewica. Out of 2000 people only 25 showed up to look for their relatives. Many more had taken the initiative to run and hide, but like my father they never came back. From here on I embarked on new journey through another bewildering period of the Stalinist regime in Poland. My drifting alone through space continued. I am a stranger in any group of people no matter what its make up. The feeling of not belonging anywhere deepened as I moved along the new journey path.

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